

SOLAR DUST:
MUSIC OF AUSTRALIAN COMPOSERS
Produced by Robert Allworth, 1998

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Australia has a unique musical heritage which is often passed over in the concert halls of this country. Yet Australian composers have drawn upon a wonderful diversity of styles and influences and looked to new horizons in their search for an individual voice, as is evidenced in the recent CD release "Solar Dust". The CD is a compilation of works by some of Australia's most respected composers including Dulcie Holland, Eric Gross, Ann Carr-Boyd and Ian Shanahan.

"Solar Dust" begins with a gentle offering to nature. Ann Carr-Boyd's piece for solo piano, *Summer Haze*, was inspired by a tropical garden scene. It is a peaceful, almost meditative piece, ripe with half-perceived visions of dappled sunlight filtering through lush foliage. Fragile droplets of rain form their own rhythmic counterpoint to this richly imagined chiaroscuro. *Summer Haze* is a sound gem. It lulls the listener into an ethereal, nascent world and imparts a sense of renewal and restfulness.

The other works on the CD strike out in divergent tangents from *Summer Haze*. In fact the variety of compositional approaches on the recording is one of its strengths, and an honest reflection of the state of contemporary composition. The diversity means that listeners may well find some things that appeal to them strongly and others much less so, however most people will find something to tantalize their taste in this selection of music.

Sandwiched between Carr Boyd's piece and Dulcie Holland's deeply expressive *Soliloquy* for strings is Robert Allworth's *Hymn to the Miracle of Lenciano, Italy* for organ (performed by Lawrence Bartlett). Inspired by a miracle in the monastery of Saint Longinus in 742, this work offers a bold contrast to the surrounding works, both in terms of its subject matter and in the magnificent effect of the towering chords and sustained pungent sonorities.

Dulcie Holland's *Soliloquy* is taken from the composer's string quartet of 1996 and is performed here by the Orpheus String Quartet. Holland studied composition with John Ireland at the Royal College of Music, London and later with Maryas Seiber, and has direct links to Australia's first generations of professionally trained classical composers through her teachers Alfred Hill and Roy Agnew. These influences are evident in Holland's predominantly lyrical style, of which the *Soliloquy* is a lovely example. The work has a strong rhetorical slant, as well as an underlying feeling of lan-

guishing melancholy, particularly where the first violin line is punctuated by whimsical twinges from the accompanying strings. The darker shades and more overtly angst-ridden moments provide an evocative contrast to the broad lyrical sweeps and gestures.

At the more abstract end of the musical spectrum are three works by Ian Shanahan, all of which draw upon the composer's fascination with astronomy and cosmology. Of the two pieces which feature mandolin, *Solar Dust: Orbits and Spirals* (for solo mandolin - played by Paul Hooper) and *Arcturus Timespace*, (for amplified mandolin, percussion, and tape - played by Stephen Morey) it is the latter that really grips and challenges the intellect. In an attempt to fathom the unfathomable, the piece reaches beyond the realm of normal perception in the search for a kind of ultra-real response to the concepts of time and space. The effect is eerie and awe-inspiring, underpinned with a sense of fear encapsulated in the words which lie at the heart of the piece: "The eternal silence of infinite space terrifies me". Sounds decay evocatively into nothingness, an imagined infinity. The mandolin becomes a highly expressive protagonist in this context, with stereotypical tremolos and other devices used sparingly and with a sensitive ear to the overall texture.

A sense of timelessness and infinite space is also intrinsic to Shanahan's *Resonances of Heaven*. Pianist Tamara Anna Cislowska creates a sense of dislocation or suspended animation. The effect is almost schizophrenic at times, with the delicate yet brittle high-pitched tinklings splintering off from a core of thick dark resonances.

Offering a different approach again, two works by Eric Gross are included on this compilation. His *Cadenza III* for mandolin (played by Paul Hooper) is a mercurial, virtuosic piece, tightly constructed around taut, pithy motives, whereas the *Three Pieces* for alto trombone and piano showcases the marvellous flexibility and inventiveness of the composer's technique. This coupled with a highly charged sense of rhythmic freedom and interplay presents challenges for the performers (Greg van der Struick on alto trombone and pianist Tony Baldwin), to which they rallied with conviction. The sudden mood changes are smoothly absorbed in these vigorous and sometimes witty interpretations. The Introduction opens with a fanfare-like call that threads its way through jaunty, interlocked rhythms and quirky dialogue playfully ornamented with the occasional trombone glissando.

The *Recitativo* offers a more dramatical perspective to begin with, but this quickly transforms into a questioning trombone monologue, punctuated by spiky, assertive interjections from the piano. The *Aria* has a more reflective feel, and is almost jazzy with "laid back" harmonies to match. The piano strolls along complacently, supportive to, but unperturbed by, the trombone's self absorbed commentary. The final movement is shaped by some beautifully sculptured contours, coloured by subtle, more romantic turns of phrase.

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Gary Monger's *Gecko* for soprano recorder (played by Ian Shanahan) is the shortest piece on the CD at only 1 minute, but it makes up for its brevity with charm. Monger explains that: "*Gecko*.....was composed on a rainy afternoon in Cherrybrook. Outside, tiny lizards chase moths and mosquitoes up the window of my studio. When a lizard catches an insect, he eats it - all the while keeping an eye on me as I compose. I think the lizards know that the piece I am writing is about them. I hope they like it".

I can't speak for the lizards, but most people will surely find it a delight!

Reviewed by Johanna Selleck, Victoria

HARLEQUINADE: MUSIC OF AUSTRALIAN COMPOSERS by Robert Allworth

JADE CD

Available from the AUSTRALIAN MUSIC CENTRE
or BROAD MUSIC, 02 9938 3440

Robert Allworth OAM has, to date, produced 68 CDs of the works of Australian composers. In this latest production he brings together an eclectic collection of piano works by six composers including Colin Brumby, Dulcie Holland, Eric Gross, Ray Lemond, Ann Carr-Boyd and Allworth himself. All but one of the works is post 1970 and teachers may wish to explore these works for secondary students or AMEB Extra List.

The complete set of Colin Brumby's *Harlequinade* (which are listed on Grades 5 and 6 of the AMEB syllabus) features as the title work. Named after characters from the old form of Italian entertainment, the *'commedia dell'arte'*, the six works in this collection are entitled *Arlecchino* (or Harlequin in English), *Columbina*, *Dottore Gratiano*, *Pulcinella*, *Pantalone*, *The Venetian* and *Il Capitano*. The rhythmic and stylistic contrast between the works gives each character its own personality and mode of expression, reflected here in the depth of playing that ranges from the delicacy of the Columbine character, to the easy-going style of *Dottore Gratiano*, to the majestic sound of *Pantalone*.

Although it has been recorded several times, Dulcie Holland's brilliant *Piano Sonata* of 1952 is here given the best performance I have yet heard. It is played by Australian pianist Ray Lemond, (the performer of *Harlequinade*) whose skilled interpretation and sensitive performance of the work cause it to linger in the memory. Rhythmically vital, the 3rd movement, *Vivo*, in particular, is utterly breathtaking.

In his role of composer, Ray Lemond here presents two of his own works, *The Land Where No Tears Fall* and *Sunlight on Running Water*, both charming miniatures. The first is played in a reflective, haunting manner whilst the second evokes the impression of water through the running semiquaver figures and quiet far-

style of the middle section. Again, a wonderful performance by Lemond.

The nostalgic, impressionistic flavour of the four contrasting works of Robert Allworth is here again, given a sensitive and thoughtful interpretation by Lemond. The tone poem characteristic and romantic style of the works will appeal to many listeners. In Lemond's performance, one can almost touch the Moonlight over Kirribilli.

Pianist Danielle Perini excites the listener with her lively interpretation of Eric Gross's *Toccata* (originally written for piano accordion) whilst *Meandering in Series* from the "Five Simple Pieces for Piano Op. 169" is a 12-tone piece that Perini performs with great competence, bringing out the work's rhythmic subtlety and tunefulness, both characteristics of Gross's compositional style.

Composer-pianist Ann Carr-Boyd here performs *Perpetual Motion*, a 1991 adaptation of Part 3 of her organ work, *The Bells of Sydney Harbour*, written in 1979. The competency and fluency of Carr-Boyd as pianist admirably captures the bell-like sounds and moto perpetuo characteristic of the work.

This is a CD that is a must for teachers of piano. The sound quality is excellent and the outstanding performances of the three pianists bring out all the nuances and subtleties that such a variety of works demands.

Attractively boxed, this JADE CD is complete with program notes.

Reviewed by Rita Crews, NSW

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This must be the easiest way to keep your CD collection up-to-date.

On page 48 of this issue you'll find a collection of recordings carefully selected by the editor for music teachers.